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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-eighth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 53rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 24 April 2002 at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. JAKUBOWSKI (Poland)

later: Mr. SALLOUM (Syrian Arab Republic)
(Vice-Chairperson)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

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RATIONALIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION (agenda item 20) (continued) (E/CN.4/2002/135, 142 and 145)

1. Ms. FILIP (Observer for Romania) said that her country had adopted a 10-year national strategy to improve the situation of the Roma people. Measures had been planned four years in advance, with specific objectives and timetables. The strategy took account of the fact that the Roma were both an ethnic minority and a socially disadvantaged group. It therefore comprised social integration, action against discrimination and prejudice and measures to improve the ability of Roma communities to organize themselves. Action would be taken in 10 areas: community development and administration, education, health, employment, economic opportunity, justice and public order, housing, child protection, culture and religious life, media and participation in public life. The Roma themselves would participate in implementing and assessing the strategy at the local, regional and national levels. The process would be overseen by a joint implementation and assessment committee, comprising government and Roma representatives.

2. Some positive results had already been obtained. The number of places reserved for Roma in the universities had risen year by year; in the current year 373 Roma had enrolled. Over 11,000 students had learned Romany in pre-university courses. The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity had launched programmes to cut Roma unemployment. A new profession had been created: Roma "health mediators" acted as link between the Roma community and the medical system. The police, working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), had developed programmes to help Roma who had no papers to obtain identity documents. During 2001, over 3,000 Roma had benefited from such programmes.

3. Roma were represented ex officio in parliament. A Roma representative advised the President on national minority questions. There was also a government department dealing with Roma affairs. Parliament had adopted legislation to prevent and punish all forms of discrimination, the implementation of which would be overseen by a National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination.

4. Ms. ANGARITA (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that HIV/AIDS had never been so high on the political agenda before, yet it continued to spread. Half of all new infections occurred among people aged 15 to 24. In Africa, millions of young women had never even heard of the disease and many others harboured serious misconceptions about how the virus was transmitted. Teenage girls in some African countries had rates of HIV infection five times higher than that of boys. They lacked the power to negotiate, since they often had lower status in their societies, and thus lacked access to resources and goods to protect themselves from unsafe and unwanted sexual relations.

5. The UNFPA mandate provided an excellent entry point for prevention activities. Greater access to education and health care was required, girls must be empowered to avoid unprotected sexual relations, and boys and men must be educated in responsible sexual behaviour. Gender-responsive HIV prevention programmes must continue to be developed.

6. In 1996, jointly with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Division for the Advancement of Women, UNFPA had organized a meeting on human rights approaches to women's health, with a view to helping the treaty bodies interpret and apply human rights standards to issues relating to women's health, particularly reproductive and sexual health. In June 2001, a follow-up meeting had been held to assess progress and elaborate further measures and strategies to be used by the treaty bodies. One of the recommendations that had emerged from the meeting - that members of the treaty committees should be given briefing sessions on reproductive and sexual health - had already been implemented. Reproductive rights were basic human rights, and the only way to control the spread of HIV was to make HIV prevention and AIDS treatment an integral part of reproductive health care.

7. Mr. HEYWARD (Observer for Australia) said that he had intended to express his delegation's continuing support and commitment to national human rights institutions and to inform the Commission of developments relating to the strengthening of such institutions. Owing to time constraints, however, plus the fact that the national institutions themselves had presented a comprehensive overview of their cooperation at the global and regional levels and their achievements at the national level, he would merely draw attention to the text of the draft resolution on national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (E/CN.4/2002/L.103), which reflected his delegation's views. He also endorsed the statement made the previous day by the representative of the Czech Republic.

8. Ms. WHELAN (Observer for Ireland) said that there had been two very important developments over the past year affecting the human rights of persons with disabilities. The first was the adoption of General Assembly resolution 56/168 establishing an ad hoc committee to consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Her delegation looked forward to participating in the drafting process, in which persons with disabilities and their representative organizations should also take part. The Commission's views, as expressed in the draft resolution on the human rights of persons with disabilities (E/CN.4/2002/L.84), would help to ensure that the negotiation would produce a satisfactory outcome.

9. Secondly, a recent study on the human rights of persons with disabilities offered an overview of how the United Nations system had engaged - or, in many cases, failed to engage - with such persons' human rights. It also offered a wide range of recommendations. The draft resolution reflected the results of that study as well as containing the Commission's views on how the ad hoc committee might proceed with its work, a recommendation for a closer relationship between the Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development and the work of the Commission on Human Rights and a recommendation that the draft resolution should be annualized.

10. The persistence of contemporary forms of slavery clearly constituted a denial of the most basic rights and freedoms. The most common form, affecting an estimated 10 million people, was debt bondage. An important development had been the adoption by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of the International Programme on Forced Labour, prioritizing bonded labour. She urged all States to support the Programme and to ratify ILO Conventions Nos. 29 and 105 on forced labour and No. 182 on child labour.

11. Mr. SZABO (Observer for Hungary) said that most major crises of the past decade had been triggered by conflicts in which ethnic identity had been a prominent element. The protection and promotion of such identity, ensuring the participation in public affairs by national and ethnic minorities, were not only a human rights issue but formed the basic premise of the non-discriminatory functioning of a democratic State. It was not surprising, therefore, that successful attempts to improve the situation of such minorities had all taken root in the soil of democracies. Prevention was the most effective form of protection for minorities and other vulnerable groups in danger. Building a culture of prevention was not easy, however, since the cost might have to be paid in the present while the benefits might lie in the future.

12. The United Nations had an irreplaceable role to play but its current mechanisms did not adequately address the interrelated dimensions of minority rights and conflict prevention. His delegation therefore suggested the preparation of a report by OHCHR analysing the degree to which existing procedures and mechanisms addressed conflict prevention involving national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. The Working Group on Minorities had indicated that there was a need to establish a minority-focused mandate within the United Nations, leading eventually to the elaboration of a universally binding document.

13. Mr. SFEIR-YOUNIS (World Bank) said that HIV/AIDS could and must be eliminated. The Bank had recently approved US$ 500 million for the Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Programme for Africa (MAP), in addition to the US$ 500 million already committed in 39 countries. An additional US$ 740 million would be committed, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. HIV/AIDS was not just a health issue: it decreased productivity and struck at the fabric of family and community life. In the hardest hit countries of sub-Saharan Africa, annual per capita growth of gross national product (GNP) might drop by 8 per cent by 2010.

14. Indigenous peoples were the poorest and most excluded section of the population. Indigenous women, who were vital to the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods, suffered particularly from lack of participation. As of April 2002, 233 projects financed by the Bank involved indigenous peoples' issues and 15 new projects were in the lending programme. The Bank supported the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and considered that its nature and

scope must be defined by the indigenous peoples themselves. Indigenous children and young people must be at the centre of the world's cultural and social pluralism. The world community had the responsibility to ensure that they felt the world belonged to them, with room for their identity to unfold.

15. Mr. KARIYAWASAM (Observer for Sri Lanka) said that the Working Group on Minorities, whose mandate was guided by the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, continued to make an invaluable contribution to the debate on the subject, though it needed more resources to perform its mandated tasks. It provided an effective forum for a constructive dialogue towards possible standard-setting solutions on issues concerning minorities.

16. The rights of a minority or other groups should not, however, be promoted at the expense of the rights of individuals or of members of other communities in the societies in which they lived. Any attempt to undermine the dignity and identity of the individual in favour of a group identity diminished the human rights of the individual and the glorification of communal identities could lead to undemocratic tendencies and even engender abominable phenomena like racism in apartheid South Africa. Moreover, too much promotion of the rights of a minority group could push a majority community into entertaining a minority complex, thus complicating the issue further.

17. Consultative methods and mechanisms should be employed to accommodate differences between majority and minority groups. Only non-violent measures would ensure democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights. His delegation sought the cooperation of the international community in strengthening his Government's efforts to address minority issues in Sri Lanka in conditions of peace and tranquillity.

18. Mr. HUHTANIEMI (Observer for Finland) said that minorities were particularly vulnerable to human rights violations during states of emergency, either because they were directly targeted or because the State was unable or unwilling to provide a sufficient level of protection. While States might derogate from some human rights obligations during emergencies, there existed rights from which no derogations were allowed. Although international human rights law was developing, much remained to be done to promote minority rights both during conflicts and in peacetime conditions. It was a fundamental human rights issue to protect and promote the rights of minorities in the broadest sense, including not only religious or linguistic groups but individuals or groups suffering from discrimination based on, for example, age, disability, work or sexual orientation. The protection of their rights benefited not just the minorities but the entire community.

19. Mr. TARAN (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that, over the past two years, the protection of the rights and dignity of migrants had finally been given its due as a central concern. At the Durban Conference, extensive attention had been paid to combating xenophobia against migrants and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which complemented ILO Conventions No. 97 and No. 143, would shortly enter into force. At least one of the three instruments had been signed and/or ratified by 68 States. The instruments provided the normative underpinning for both national migration policy and international cooperation in the field of labour migration.

20. Protection against discrimination on the basis of HIV status was essential for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, which should also be recognized as a workplace issue, not only because it decimated the labour force and reduced productivity and profitability, but also because the workplace had a role to play in the wider struggle to limit the spread and effects of the epidemic. The ILO Code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work, adopted in June 2001 after widespread consultation among the tripartite partners in ILO, provided guidelines for specific responses to HIV/AIDS at every level, with the aim of preventing HIV/AIDS, managing and mitigating its impact on the world of work, caring for workers infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and eliminating discrimination on the basis of real or perceived HIV status.

21. One theme that had repeatedly arisen over the past few years in the course of ILO supervision of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, No. 169, was the duty of States to consult indigenous and tribal peoples concerning any measures affecting them or any exploration or exploitation of natural resources on their lands.

22. Archbishop MARTIN (Observer for the Holy See) said that there was an urgent need to intensify reflection at the international level on the theme of migration, which would inevitably become one of the characteristics of a globalized economy. A forward-looking human rights framework on migration was required to inspire and evaluate the new legislative measures being prepared by many Governments. The first precondition for such a framework was that it should be set within a positive image of migration. Policies that unscrupulously exploited fear of migrants were not worthy of enlightened societies and were also counterproductive.

23. The phenomenon of trafficking in human beings constituted a sad mark of contemporary society, taking on the connotations of modern-day slavery. Unscrupulous criminal bands traded and sold human beings along complex slave routes, at times in unimaginable conditions. Other criminal networks that controlled their employment opportunities often further enslaved them. Because of their illegal condition, they might have no effective means of redress. A more coherent attack on criminal organizations engaged in such trafficking was required.

24. The Holy See welcomed the proposed international convention on the human rights of persons with disabilities which, it hoped, would become an important standard-setting document facilitating the mainstreaming of the concerns of persons with disabilities and inspiring appropriate social welfare policies.

25. Mr. NAJAFOV (Observer for Azerbaijan) said that his delegation regularly spoke on agenda item 14 (c), since one person in eight in his country had been driven from their homes as a result of ethnic cleansing. Following the 14-year occupation of Azerbaijan territories and the significant reduction in humanitarian assistance, owing to the long-drawn-out nature of the conflict, the situation of the refugees and displaced persons had reached catastrophic proportions. The problem was compounded by the presence of refugees from third countries, including Afghanistan. Their problems could not, however, be properly described in the course of so restricted a speaking time.

26. Mr. SUNGAR (Observer for Turkey) said that, in addressing the question of migrants and migrant workers, policies of integration rather than assimilation should be pursued. Measures should also be taken to prevent negative stereotyping of migrant workers in the media,

with a view to promoting tolerance, non-discrimination and mutual understanding in their societies. ILO studies provided evidence of direct and indirect discrimination against migrant workers and members of their families in different parts of the world. His delegation thus welcomed the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and hoped that the provisions regarding migrants and migrant workers would be fully implemented. A more focused and consistent approach was required. In that connection, his delegation fully supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants.

27. Ms. HOUMMANE (Observer for Morocco) said that the issue of migration required deep understanding and worldwide cooperation if migratory flows were to be properly managed, legal economic migration promoted and clandestine migration discouraged. The priority for her Government was the introduction of initiatives to help the Moroccan communities in Europe. Every effort should be made to improve their living conditions, ensure their freedom of movement and help them to preserve their cultural identity.

28. The appalling events of 11 September 2001 had brought about a most unfortunate association between Islam and terrorism. While firmly and unequivocally condemning terrorism, her delegation was concerned about the impact of such an association on the rights of migrants, who had been subjected to xenophobic and racist behaviour. The international community should be vigilant in preventing anything that could cause marginalization and the violation of immigrants' rights. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families would be most useful in that regard.

29. Ultimately, the issue was one of development. At a time of globalization, the aim must be the emergence of a new world in which human rights were fully respected. Cooperation and solidarity should thus be strengthened and security considerations give way to more objective and humane social and economic ones.

30. Miss AL-ADSANI (Observer for Kuwait) said that the Constitution of Kuwait provided persons with disabilities, who needed more help than others, with social security and medical care. There were also many organizations that assisted such persons. A law specifically protecting persons with physical and psychological disabilities had been adopted in 1996. It defined disability rights, including the right to medical treatment within the State or abroad, the right to special housing, the right to access to rehabilitation centres and specialized institutions, the right to a special social allowance and the right to tools and electronic instruments for their activities, which were exempt from tax or customs duty.

31. State policy was to rehabilitate persons with disabilities and to encourage them to work so that they felt themselves to be useful citizens deserving respect and attention. An employer could be sanctioned for refusing, without good reason, to engage a person with a disability. A Supreme Council overseeing the situation of persons with disabilities had also been established. The Council issued certificates of disability; increased social allowances for children with disabilities from 50 to 75 Kuwaiti dinars (KD); issued special identity cards for disabled persons; facilitated marriage loans of as much as KD 4,000 (approximately US$ 12,000) for couples with disabilities; gave education grants to students with disabilities; provided social contributions for low-income families containing children with disabilities; and followed up and monitored the private schools for persons with disabilities.

32. Ms. MINA (Observer for Cyprus), speaking in the context of the consequences of the 1974 Turkish invasion and occupation of much of her country's territory, recalled that the European Court of Human Rights had made two important rulings with regard to displaced persons and the enclaved population remaining in the occupied areas. It had ruled in 1996 that Turkey had violated an applicant's right to use and enjoy her property as a result of the forcible division of the island and that the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Turkey was a party, had extraterritorial effect on Turkey by virtue of its military control of the area. The decision, though binding, had still not been executed by Turkey.

33. In 2001, the European Court of Human Rights had found Turkey responsible for mass violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to their property of the displaced persons and the rights of the enclaved persons in the occupied area. By refusing to allow the return of any displaced Greek Cypriot, Turkey was in violation of the European Convention. Furthermore, the deplorable conditions to which the enclaved persons were subject were found to amount to cruel and degrading treatment. Once again Turkey had not yet complied with the Court's decision.

34. Mr. GRUBB (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that a denial of human rights could increase and/or exacerbate vulnerability to ill-health and, conversely, promotion of human rights could reduce vulnerability to ill-health. Accordingly, WHO was integrating a human rights perspective into its activities. Its report called Rethinking Care contained personal testimonies of people with disabilities about their view of health care and what could be done to improve their quality of life while its publication The World Health Report: New Understanding, New Hope sought to heighten awareness of mental health and put an end to the stigma and discrimination that undermined efforts to prevent and treat mental illness.

35. WHO had also recently published a study of 10 countries drawing attention to neglect and abuse of older persons which stressed that healthy ageing was more than just the absence of disease. A new policy framework called Active Ageing launched at the Second World Assembly on Ageing was grounded on the human rights of older people as reflected in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

36. The greatest challenge was that posed by HIV/AIDS, which, because it was transmitted mainly through unprotected sex and the sharing of needles, touched upon issues which many societies found taboo and affected groups and individuals already marginalized by society and the health care system, such as sex workers, intravenous drug users, men who had sex with men, and young people. Abuse of the human rights of persons living with or merely suspected of having HIV/AIDS was widespread. Experience had shown, however, that the most effective response to the epidemic was to prevent the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and protect the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS and of those most at risk of infection.

37. The health sector had a responsibility to ensure confidentiality, equal access to care, informed consent and the observance of universal precautions. Health systems which did so were more effective and efficient and played a more positive role in catalysing society at large.

In that connection, he recalled the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the special session of the General Assembly in June 2001 in which the Member States had committed themselves to eliminating all forms of discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS and members of vulnerable groups.

38. Much could be done by Governments through leadership and political will that did not cost a great deal of money, for example by implementing laws and policies which enhanced participation of vulnerable groups and promoting tolerance and respect, regardless of an individual's health status.

39. Ms. BACH TOBJI (Observer for Tunisia) said that her Government had reinforced human rights infrastructures and set great store by the role of human rights defenders. It consequently supported the draft resolution on human rights defenders and had always cooperated with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Her delegation recognized the impartiality and objectivity which the Special Representative had shown at all times.

40. She regretted that some elements of society attempted to abuse United Nations mechanisms through exaggerations and disinformation, and that affected the good image of human rights defenders. The Commission should not be taken in by such efforts, which tended to lead to confrontation and the politicization of human rights and delayed the implementation of those rights. Her delegation would continue to support constructive attempts to promote human rights but would continue to oppose nihilistic and selective visions of human rights which gave rise to terrorism.

41. Mr. HUSSAIN (Observer for Iraq) said that his country had a gal and democratic framework to guarantee the rights of minorities and prevent racism and discrimination. The Constitution recognized the Arab and Kurdish nationalities which made up the Iraqi people, and guaranteed the latter's civil rights as well as the rights of other minorities. Appropriate legislation had been enacted to ensure those constitutional rights were respected.

42. The question of minority rights had nevertheless been used as a pretext by the United States of America and the United Kingdom to intervene in Iraq's domestic affairs through the imposition, following the 1991 Gulf War, of two no-fly zones, in the north to protect the Kurdish minority and in the south to protect the Shi'ite minority. Those zones had no legal basis and, as the Secretary-General had stated in November 2001, they had been established unilaterally and not by Security Council resolutions. In pretending to defend the Kurds in the no-fly zone, while condemning Kurds in other neighbouring countries as terrorists, the United States proved its policy of double standards in human rights issues.

43. Ms. DEMPSTER (Observer for New Zealand) stressed her Government's attachment to the rights of indigenous peoples, including the Maori people of New Zealand and said it was looking forward to the first meeting of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. It had provided technical and financial assistance for the establishment of the Forum and encouraged other Governments to do likewise. It was vital, however, that the Forum should be allocated adequate regular budget funding to enable it to fulfil its mandate.

44. Concerning the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, she welcomed the good will and commitment shown by the representatives of indigenous peoples at the seventh session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and said that her delegation was committed to achieving a declaration which would attract broad consensus support and be applicable to indigenous peoples everywhere. She also welcomed the first report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people (E/CN.4/2002/97) and looked forward to cooperating with him in the future. It was gratifying that consensus language on indigenous peoples had been achieved at the Durban Conference and that indigenous participation in the upcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development was being encouraged. At the forthcoming special session of the General Assembly on children, the situation of indigenous children would be a priority for her delegation.

45. At the domestic level, her Government was committed to eliminating the social and economic disparities between Maori and non-Maori New Zealanders. Its ongoing "capacity-building" project aimed at taking advantage of the strengths of Maori communities with a view to meeting their needs and empowering the Maori to solve their own problems. The only way forward was through cooperation and partnership. Her Government was committed to strengthening the ability of the Maori to have greater control of their own development in New Zealand and, at the international level, it remained committed to ensuring that indigenous issues were addressed openly and constructively within the United Nations system.

46. Mr. SCEPANOVIC (Observer for Yugoslavia) said that his parliament had recently passed one of the most liberal and comprehensive laws in Europe on the protection of the rights and freedoms of national minorities. It provided for cultural expression and participation in civil society, set minimum standards for human rights protection and prohibited discriminatory laws or regulations.

47. Minority rights were guaranteed and the law envisaged the establishment of national councils whose representatives would be included in the Federal Council for National Minorities, which would advise the Government on minority issues. Minorities would receive financial support from the Federal Fund for National Minorities. The Roma population, for example, had for the first time been guaranteed the status of a national minority and affirmative measures had been envisaged to improve their position.

48. Minorities which comprised at least 2 per cent of the population were entitled to address federal bodies in their mother tongue and to receive a reply in their local language. At the local and regional level, wherever a minority comprised 15 per cent of the population the minority language would be an official language. The right to education in the mother tongue from primary to high school was also guaranteed. National councils would assist in developing a curriculum that promoted tolerance and coexistence. Minority language training programmes would be introduced into teacher training programmes. Media, news and cultural programmes would be offered in minority languages and minorities would have the right to establish their own media outlets as well as cultural, scientific and religious institutions.

49. The Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic Communities had entered into bilateral agreements on the protection of minorities with neighbouring countries with a view to resolving issues regarding minorities of those States in Yugoslavia and the status of Serbian and

Montenegrin communities in those countries. His Government looked forward to the continued support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and more particularly of its High Commissioner on National Minorities.

50. Mr. NAESS (Observer for Norway) said that human rights defenders were at risk and he therefore welcomed the second report of the Special Representative on the situation of human rights defenders (E/CN.4/2002/106 and Add.1 and 2), which underscored certain issues, for example the situation of women human rights defenders, the increased risk caused by political tensions and armed conflict and the need for human rights mechanisms to be more involved in peace initiatives and emergency responses of the United Nations as well as for better coordination of those efforts. The issue of the human rights risk posed by the fight against terrorism had been widely debated by the Commission.

51. The encouraging support expressed by Governments for the work of the Special Representative must be translated into practical action. The Special Representative must be given access and receive the full support of Governments. Her suggestions on ways to improve dialogue and cooperation with Governments merited attention.

52. Governments must become more tolerant of criticism. Openness and dialogue with human rights groups and defenders was a sign not of weakness but of strength. The result might well be better protection of human rights and improvement of the situation of those who, often at great personal risk, had the courage to work to improve respect for human rights.

53. Mr. GASPERONI (Observer for San Marino) said that his Government was adamantly opposed to the death penalty, even in the context of the fight against terrorism. Security concerns must not lead to human rights violations, which would be a victory for the terrorists and a defeat for the rule of law and democracy and United Nations principles. His delegation had once again been a sponsor of the resolution on the death penalty introduced by the European Union.

54. Abolition of the death penalty could be achieved in the context of international human rights protections. He urged Member States to reduce gradually the number of crimes subject to the death penalty, declare a moratorium on executions and thus move steadily towards the complete abolition of capital punishment.

55. Mr. TROJAN (Observer for the European Commission) said that the European Commission mainstreamed human rights considerations into its funding programmes and policy activities. Country strategy papers were being established which included human rights as a key element and appropriate human rights training for officials on the ground was being provided. The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights currently allocated over 100 million euros per year to NGOs and international organizations. That assistance complemented the funding that was delivered through country programmes.

56. Many human rights issues, such as the prevention of torture and the rehabilitation of torture victims, had been tackled and, in 2002-2004, funding would focus on four key priorities: democratization, good governance and the rule of law; abolition of the death penalty; the fight against torture and impunity; and international funding and tribunals to combat racism and

discrimination against minorities and indigenous peoples. Civil society would be the main beneficiary of assistance and NGOs were key interlocutors, not only as recipients of aid but as contributors to the formulation of policy.

57. Specific issues of concern were also addressed through targeted projects in cooperation with international organizations such as the United Nations and OSCE. Issues to be addressed by the European Initiative in the future included corporate social responsibility, and labour standards for the protection of health and the environment. At a time when human rights principles were under challenge, the international community must target its assistance as effectively as possible. That was the goal towards which the European Commission would continue to work.

58. Mr. MALEMPRÉ (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said he wished to stress the importance of human rights education. The commitment of UNESCO to maintaining its system of associated schools in more than 145 countries which promoted the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a major contribution to the Decade for Human Rights Education. UNESCO also funded university chairs in peace, human rights and democracy and organized annually a network of human rights training and research institutes which were working towards implementation of the Plan of Action of the Decade.

59. UNESCO had also made the issue of bioethics a priority. The first major step had been the establishment of a bioethics programme in 1993 followed by the adoption by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1997 of the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, the first instrument of its kind, subsequently adopted by the General Assembly in 1998. Two bodies had been created as a result of those initiatives: the International Bioethics Committee (IBC), made up of independent experts, and the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC) made up of representatives of its member States. The UNESCO budget for 2002-2003 included funding for ethics in science and technology, thus confirming the leadership role of UNESCO in that area. That focus reflected the concern evinced by States and peoples, about the risks posed by rapid scientific advances and their applications.

60. The UNESCO bioethics programme involved four major components: an intellectual and scientific forum for the exchange of views; advice and capacity-building at the national level, including the establishment of national ethics committees and networks of stakeholders; education and training in bioethics for specialists and young people; and standard setting. With regard to the last of those, consideration would be given to developing a normative instrument, given the growing recognition of the need to provide ethical standards for the life sciences.

61. Modern societies must establish a moral framework for the applications of science. Fear of the possible risks should not be allowed to hinder research but a balance must be struck which took into account human dignity, the need for progress and human solidarity.

62. Ms. BRETT (Association for the Prevention of Torture), speaking also on behalf of Amnesty International, the Friends World Committee for Consultation (QUAKERS), Human Rights Watch, the International Commission of Jurists, the International Federation of ACAT (Action of Christians for the Abolition of Torture) and the International Federation of Human

Rights Leagues, welcomed the recent decisions of Brazil, Georgia, Costa Rica, Peru and Switzerland to extend standing invitations to Commission mechanisms to visit their countries. She echoed the call made by the High Commissioner for all the member States of the Commission to do likewise and also called on all candidates for election to the Commission to do so.

63. Governments did not always respond promptly to requests for visits and a standing invitation would address that problem and facilitate the implementation of special procedures. States which had issued standing invitations should encourage their fellow States to follow their example and notification of standing invitations should be provided in writing to OHCHR, which should establish a list of the States that had issued such standing invitations, circulate that list to the special procedures and submit the list annually to the Commission.

64. Ms. AULA (Franciscans International) speaking also on behalf of Anti-Slavery International, Caritas Internationalis, Dominicans for Justice and Peace and Trócaire, the Irish Catholic Agency for World Development, said that modern forms of slavery, such as forced labour, bonded labour, trafficking in persons and many of the worst forms of child labour, persisted on a large scale throughout the world. To ensure the effective elimination of bonded labour, the Commission must support independent assessments of the extent of the problem. The surveys should be disaggregated by gender, age and minority group with a view to establishing regional action plans to eliminate all forms of bondage. The action plans should also incorporate measures to reinforce labour inspections, organize public information campaigns and ensure adequate monitoring. Monitoring systems should record how many bonded labourers were freed, and how much compensation was paid as well as the number of convictions for using bonded labour and the sentences handed down.

65. States must demonstrate the political will to eliminate contemporary forms of slavery. That implied tackling the mechanisms by which people were enslaved as well as the causes of slavery such as poverty, discrimination, corruption and increasing inequalities between regions and countries. The Commission should establish a consolidated reporting system to provide clear and regular reports on the degree to which existing international standards, in particular with regard to slavery, were implemented.

66. Mr. CHAPMAN (Minority Rights Group International), speaking also on behalf of the International Movement Against all Forms of Discrimination and Racism, called on the Commission to establish a voluntary trust fund to facilitate the attendance of minority representatives in meetings of the Working Group on Minorities. He also called on States which had not yet done so to issue a standing invitation to all mechanisms of the Commission and urged those mechanisms to pay particular attention to the situation of minorities.

67. Minorities still suffered from social and economic exclusion and violations of their human rights and were directly affected by violent conflict to a disproportionate degree. In the past, the Commission mechanisms had not been able to focus the attention of the United Nations sufficiently on the dangers of violent conflict which engulfed minorities. A striking example was the failure to act on information from a special procedure of the Commission which had resulted in the preventable genocide in Rwanda.

68. He therefore called on the Commission to appoint a special representative of the Secretary-General on minorities in the belief that such a mechanism would be able to highlight situations of tension involving minorities which presented a risk of escalating into violent conflict. The mechanism would also engage in preventive diplomacy with a view to promoting peaceful resolution of disputes.

69. Ms. LE PENNEC (World Organization against Torture), speaking also on behalf of the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues with regard to their joint project, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, said that the Observatory's annual report for 2001 revealed that human rights defenders faced various repressive strategies in more than 80 countries and mentioned 400 cases of human rights abuses against defenders. Human rights defenders around the globe continued to face unacceptable violations of their freedom of expression, association and movement and often paid dearly for their commitment. The events of 11 September 2001 had increased the degree of suspicion with which defenders were treated. The adoption and/or reinforcement of anti-terrorist laws had restricted the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms.

70. In Asia, despite the extreme diversity of country situations, most human rights defenders operated against the background of national security laws that seriously restricted their activities, notably in Viet Nam, Nepal, Malaysia and India. In 2001, a record number of defenders had been threatened with death or had been executed in Latin America, particularly in Colombia. In Africa, NGO relations with the authorities remained tense and difficult. Defending human rights in the North Africa or in the Middle East zone was a real challenge.

71. Although there had been significant developments at the regional level, international protection for human rights defenders was needed more than ever before. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for human rights defenders should be given all the resources she needed to fulfil her mandate.

72. Ms. LOPEZ (Colombian Commission of Jurists) drew attention to the critical situation in Colombia, where over 2 million people had been forced off their land in the previous 10 years. Over 300,000 people had been internally displaced in 2001. The Government had failed to adopt a serious policy to address the problem on the basis of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2) and international recommendations. It did not provide any protection or assistance to internally displaced persons, who had no guarantee of a safe return. She urged the Commission to call on States to apply the Guiding Principles and to identify the most appropriate mechanisms for complying with international regulations.

73. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders had visited Colombia in 2001. Her report (E/CN.4/2002/106/Add.2) revealed the difficult conditions in which human rights defenders, including journalists and indigenous leaders, had to work. In 2001, at least 14 NGO workers and 164 trade union members had been assassinated. Many others had been forced into exile. The situation continued to deteriorate because the Government was unwilling to act. The Commission should urge the Government to implement the Special Representative's recommendations.

74. Ms. LEURINDA (All for Reparations and Emancipation) said that she would welcome the establishment of a working group or other mechanism of the Commission to study the problems of racial discrimination faced by people of African descent living in the African Diaspora and to make proposals for the elimination of racial discrimination against people of African descent. Racial discrimination was part and parcel of the negation of the essence of victims. Afro-descendant minorities had seen their language, culture and religion forcibly removed and continued to suffer racial discrimination as a lingering effect of slavery.

75. Mr. SCHIBLI (International Organization for the Development of Freedom of Education) said that a group of NGOs sponsored by Human Rights Education Associates had formulated a number of recommendations for the Commission to include in a resolution on human rights education, with particular reference to the need to reach the targets of the United Nations Decade on Human Rights Education. The recommendations included the appointment of a special rapporteur for human rights education, the creation of a voluntary fund to support activities in the field of human rights education and the convening of intersessional workshops aimed at defining priorities and setting the agenda and action plan for the remaining years of the Decade. The Commission should request the inclusion of human rights education on the agenda of all treaty bodies for the remainder of the Decade so that recommendations would be formulated on the issue and States would be invited to report on their progress. Clear priorities must be set and immediate action should be taken if the Decade was to result in concrete measures.

76. Mr. TAYLOR (International Association for Religious Freedom) said that, in China, although the Constitution stipulated that citizens could enjoy freedom of religion, the measures adopted by the Government severely restricted that freedom. Millions of Chinese were forced to meet in secret in order to exercise their right and thousands had been imprisoned. A particularly violent campaign was being waged against the members of the Falun Gong movement, which had been brutally attacked by the Government since 1999, because of its growing popularity. According to reports, over 100,000 members of the movement had been arrested, more than 20,000 had been sent without trial to labour camps and over 350 had died as a result of acts of violence and torture suffered during their arrest or detention.

77. Mr. Salloum (Syrian Arab Republic), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

78. Ms. HEYER (Europe-Third World Centre (CETIM)) said that, despite the initial commitment by the new President of Mexico to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict in Chiapas, he had not kept his promises and the question of the indigenous people was no longer at the top of his Government's agenda. The constitutional reform on indigenous rights and culture, adopted by Congress in 2001, represented a total denial of indigenous rights; for example, it did not recognize the rights of indigenous people to the collective use of natural resources. Its adoption had therefore been highly contentious and was being tested in the Supreme Court. She urged the Government to take the necessary steps to implement the indigenous rights bill drafted by the Congress Commission on Peace in Chiapas (COCOPA) in accordance with the San Andrés Agreements.

79. The Puebla-Panama Plan was intended to bring about structural changes and development that would benefit the most marginalized people in southern Mexico. However, transnational companies would gain the most profit therefrom. The Plan, which involved the

large-scale construction of roads and railways and the exploitation of natural resources, posed a real threat to the indigenous populations whose land was coveted because of its natural wealth and biodiversity. The Plan had been adopted without the consent of the indigenous people concerned and was in breach of ILO Convention No. 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries. The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people should investigate the violations of the human rights of the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

80. Mr. MANHAS (Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization) said that the mass exoduses and displacement of persons as a result of man-made calamities was a tragic situation that gave rise to many human rights violations. Many of the villages situated along the 700 mile-long Line of Control separating the troops of India and Pakistan were bearing the brunt of heavy and indiscriminate shelling from the Pakistani side, which had caused many civilian casualties and the massive destruction of property and livestock, forcing villagers to abandon their homes and become displaced. The intensity of the shelling had increased greatly in recent years, because militants, including foreign mercenaries, from Pakistan were using the cover of shelling to infiltrate into Jammu and Kashmir. While the defence personnel and security forces were protected by bunkers and other safety measures, civilians were left defenceless and forced to live in intolerable conditions. The Government of Pakistan should be urged to end the indiscriminate shelling of border settlements.

81. Mr. BONNET (Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme) said that, in October 2001, the lawyer Digna Ochoa y Placido, the legal director of the Agustin Pro human rights centre, had been shot dead in her office in Mexico City. She had received a number of threats in 1996 and 1999 in connection with the cases on which she was working. In 1999, employees of the Augustin Pro centre had, on several occasions, been threatened with death. The threats had been reported to the authorities but no action had been taken. Seven months after the death, the investigators were bogged down on the hypothesis that the victim had committed suicide. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights had called for the investigation to be re-opened.

82. He urged the Commission to call on the Government of Mexico to do its utmost to protect the security of lawyers and human rights defenders, to guarantee the right of defence and equal access of all people to justice, and to do everything in its power to resolve the Ochoa case.

83. Ms. CAVE (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) said that, in Colombia, indigenous peoples and civilians of African descent were particularly affected by the massive internal displacement policy carried out by the paramilitary forces with total impunity, the aim of which was to extend large landholdings still further and to allow companies to exploit their natural resources. A significant number of them were women and children who had been chased from the land after the male heads of their families had disappeared or been killed. They found refuge in the cities and lived in utter poverty with no access to health services or proper sanitation facilities. There was little humanitarian aid and the Government did not provide any assistance to help them become self-sufficient. The women were, consequently, organizing themselves in their struggle to survive, assisted by local women's organizations, but their leaders were harassed, threatened or killed, or driven into exile. She urged the Commission to address the precarious situation of those women and their families.

84. Ms. COOMBER (South Asia Human Rights Documentation Centre) said it was regrettable that the issue of the Bhutanese refugees in eastern Nepal was no longer being given due attention by the Commission. The Governments concerned had done little to expedite the next round of ministerial talks. The process of verifying the nationality status of refugees in the Khundanbari camp had been completed but the official results had not been published. In other camps, the verification process had been discontinued. Many other unresolved issues, such as the categorization of refugees, remained a bone of contention between the two Governments.

85. In March 1996, the European Parliament had called on both Governments to find a solution that would allow for the return of the refugees and, in 1999, the Chairman of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities had called on the Governments to resolve the problem in good faith; yet there had still been little progress.

86. Human rights concerns were an early warning sign of trouble in the region. The failure to facilitate the return of the refugees could have very grave consequences. The King of Bhutan might have won the battle against ethnic Nepali and Sarchop dissidents who wanted greater democracy, but he could be losing the bigger war for his nation's sovereignty. The Bhutanese Government was unable to police its borders to stop activity by members of the armed opposition groups from India. The latest challenge was the reported armed presence of the United Liberation Front of Assam and Bodo tribal insurgents in camps in southern and eastern Bhutan.

87. Mr. PUNJABI (Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation) said that the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contributed to political and social stability and peace and enriched the cultural heritage of a society as a whole. The principle underlying the promotion and protection of minority rights was enshrined in Commission resolution 2000/52, according to which minorities contributed to the diversity of societies and the protection of minority rights promoted a culture of tolerance. The basic impediment to such promotion and protection was the non-recognition of diversity.

88. Minority rights had suffered immensely in States which pursued the objective of setting up a uniform religious and cultural order, because sectarian minorities complicated the issue and terrorists and extremists found encouragement and even assistance in targeting minorities. Minority rights would continue to suffer in the absence of democratic order, where minorities were denied access to resources and participation in governance. He urged the Commission to put pressure on those States and political organizations that continued to pursue the objective of establishing a uniform religious and cultural order to restore democracy based on pluralism and tolerance and thus enable minorities to enjoy their legal and human rights.

89. Mr. FATTORINI (Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples) said that his organization wished to highlight the situation of the people of Western Sahara who had been fighting for their independence for three decades. It invited the Kingdom of Morocco to organize a referendum on their autonomy and to respect their freedom of expression. Both parties to the conflict should respect humanitarian law and exchange prisoners without further delay.

90. A further concern was the plight of the Kurds in Turkey and his organization denounced the Turkish Government's prohibition of the use of Kurdish as an official language and called upon it to allow the teaching of the language in schools. It was also concerned about the human rights situation of the Roma people, which was still subjected to institutional discrimination in a number of European countries.

91. Mrs. REYNOLDS (Australian Council for Overseas Aid) urged all States to increase their commitment to the rights of women and children, refugees, displaced persons, migrant workers, disabled persons and indigenous peoples. In Australia, human rights defenders were actively working to reform arbitrary detention policies which had a severe impact on the human rights of asylum-seekers. Her organization welcomed the visit to Australia in May 2001 by the High Commissioner's Regional Adviser for the Asia Pacific Region to inspect the conditions in Woomera camp and also the visit by the Committee on Arbitrary Detention. It hoped that a constructive dialogue between the Government of Australia and civil society would ensure justice for asylum-seekers and promote a more reasonable role for Australia in addressing the international refugee situation.

92. Mr. CHAVEZ (North-South XXI) said that, following the Chiapas conflict, compensation programmes by the Mexican Government did not allow for the repair of damage done by paramilitary groups and were therefore very unjust. The Red Cross was reducing its aid to displaced persons and people were consequently being forced to return to their homes in unstable conditions. Government programmes for assistance discriminated against the poor and did not implement the provisions of the San Andrés agreements. The Puebla-Panama Plan had been drawn up for the benefit of transnational corporations, not indigenous peoples, and had resulted in a further deterioration in those peoples' situation. Financial groups exploiting the cheap labour force and natural resources had only increased the genocide.

93. Mr. HALEPOTA (Interfaith International) said that the Sindhis, were highly dependant on agriculture. However, despite massive protests and the arrest of many Sindhi nationalists, they were being totally deprived of their share of water from the Indus River because the Government of Pakistan was allowing the construction of dams and canals upstream. Their agrarian economy had suffered severely as a result of the acute water shortage over the previous six months, and in some cases, people were dying because they had no access to drinking water. The dam construction also had a disastrous ecological impact.

94. Over 8 million acres of ancestral land had been forcibly taken from the Sindhi people and allocated to military generals and other outside settlers. The natural resources of the area were being exploited without due compensation to the indigenous people, who were being forced to live in poverty. In the absence of any constitutional protection, the cultural, economic, social, civil and political rights of the Sindhi people were being violated. They thus demanded their right to self-determination.

95. Mr. GUPTA (European Union of Public Relations) said that military rule in Pakistan was an obstacle to democratic peace in South Asia and that any international agreements entered into by the unelected military regime in Pakistan would not have sanctity in law or the support of the people. Unless General Musharraf allowed political parties to function openly and held

elections, he would not be able to create an instrument to negotiate a genuine peace with India. Democrats around the world should censure General Musharraf's deliberate subversion of democratic norms.

96. Mr. WAIDENDEY (World Federation of Trade Unions) said that the tendency of many societies was to try and assimilate and integrate minorities and that created a fear psychosis and a greater ghettoization of minority groups. If the diversity of human nature were to be a productive asset, then both States and societies had to create an environment where minority groups were able to perpetuate their unique heritage and culture while looking upon themselves as an integral part of the community in which they resided.

97. Ms. LORSHINA (International League for Human Rights) said that, although the Russian Federation had ratified all the major international treaties and the Russian Constitution and federal legislation prohibited discrimination, racial profiling and discriminatory law-enforcement practices were widespread, particularly in the Krasnodar region. Over the past few years, the situation for the Meshketian Turks, Armenians, Azeris, Kurds, Hemshins, Georgians and refugees from Abkhazia had become especially dire there. The Meskhetians in particular were banned from taking leases on land, denied access to justice and subjected to continuous harassment and violent action by the police. Following a visit by a Joint Commission of OSCE and the UNHCR, the Russian authorities had promised to improve the situation but nothing had been done and the federal authorities continued to ignore the regional government's unlawful actions.

98. Ms. SONG (Liberation), said her organization was concerned about human rights abuses against Buddhist, Hindu and Christian minorities in Bangladesh as a result of a wave of Muslim fundamentalist violence. It was also concerned about the serious risks faced by human rights defenders, particularly in Indonesia. Two of West Papua's leading human rights activists had recently received death threats and, in Aceh province, human rights defenders, civil society leaders and humanitarian workers were targets of the security forces. She urged the Government of Indonesia to take all the necessary steps to ensure the safety of human rights defenders, to issue an invitation to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights defenders and to conduct investigations into violations committed against activists.

99. Mr. LITTMAN (Association for World Education) said that during the civil war in Sudan, to which no end was in sight after 20 years, more than 2 million people had died and over 4.5 million had been displaced. Furthermore, women and children were still being abducted and enslaved in the southern Sudan. Yet, at the same time, Sudan was a member of the League of Arab States, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the United Nations and the Commission on Human Rights.

100. Mr. LITTMAN (World Union for Progressive Judaism) said that, during the twentieth century, the ancient Jewish communities of the Middle East and North Africa had been destroyed, brutally massacred or forced to flee. Roughly half of the population of 5 million in Israel was made up of those refugees and their descendants. There was a tendency to spotlight the Arab refugees from Palestine in order to demonize Israel but it was important also to remember the many Jewish refugees who had fled to Israel from Arab countries.

101. Mrs. LEURINDA (African Commission of Health and Human Rights Promoters) said that, when the return and rehabilitation of migrated or exiled people was being considered, it was essential to ensure that the causes of the exoduses or displacement had been eradicated. If the displacement had taken place as a result of ethnic discrimination or religious persecution, the State had to convince the returnees that a foolproof remedy had been found. It was also necessary to ensure that those who returned were provided with an appropriate habitat so that they did not feel isolated. The most essential condition of all for the return of displaced persons was a sense of responsibility in the majority community.

102. Mr. PARASCHOS (International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic and other Minorities) said that, in occupied Cyprus, the Greek Cypriot population was being ethnically cleansed, as confirmed in a judgement by the European Court of Human Rights and various Security Council resolutions. Moreover, the repressive occupation and an influx of settlers from Turkey had forced thousands of Turkish Cypriots to seek a better life elsewhere until the Turkish occupation authorities had decided to put a stop to that exodus by making it a crime for Turkish Cypriots to possess Cypriot passports. Freedom of expression was also denied by the occupying regime and Turkish Cypriot journalists had been harassed and even murdered. The people of Cyprus hoped that the Commission, having taken such a strong stand on the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory during its current session, would take the same stand against Turkey's occupation of Cyprus.

103. Mrs. GRANGE (International Catholic Migration Commission) said that the international community's growing awareness of the issue of internally displaced persons was one of the Commission's main contributions to the advancement of human rights over the past decade. Her organization commended the dissemination of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, including their increasing availability in non-official languages and recommended that health, welfare and education professionals should also be included in information campaigns.

104. It was concerned, however, that the international community's response to specific situations of displacement remained ad hoc and was focused on assistance. She reminded States of their particular obligation under Principle 9 of the Guiding Principles to protect indigenous peoples, minorities, peasants and pastoralists. Returns should be voluntary and sustainable, to avoid further human rights violations and suffering, and local integration must be facilitated in the face of continued obstacles to viable returns.

105. Mr. BARNES (International Human Rights Association of American Minorities (IHRAAM)) said he wished to draw the Commission's attention to the plight of Muslim minorities in non-Muslim countries, citing the barbaric and degrading treatment of the Muslim minority in India and the violence in the State of Gujarat as an example. The tragic events of 11 September 2001 had also caused increased attacks on innocent Muslim civilians which his organization condemned. Anti-Muslim sentiment had also been reflected in acts of official policy: official discrimination included racial profiling at airports, curtailment of legitimate business and charities, detention without charge, discriminatory scrutiny, deportations and interrogations without probable cause.

106. Mr. AHMAD (World Muslim Congress) said he wished to draw the Commission's attention to the violence against Muslims that had occurred in the Indian State of Gujarat in February 2002, resulting in the massacre of over 2,000 people. Any talk by the Indian Government of its society as being "pluralist" and "multicultural" was merely an exercise in public relations; India was governed by religious fundamentalists, dedicated to communal politics.

107. Mr. GORDON-LENNOX (Reporters without Borders International) said that, two weeks previously, a journalist and human rights activist had been murdered by soldiers of the Philippine army while investigating the implementation of the peace process in Cotabato province on the island of Mindanao. The murder was a good example of how the authorities regarded activists and journalists as enemies because they exposed the abuses of the security forces. In fact, journalists played a vital role in exposing human rights violations in many countries. They risked their freedom and security to report details of attacks on human dignity and report on investigations by human rights organizations. His organization therefore asked the Special Representative on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression to work together to protect journalists who were victimized and called upon the Commission to condemn those countries that deprived journalists of their rights for denouncing human rights violations.

108. Mrs. THEPHSOUVANH (Transnational Radical Party) drew attention to the continued denial of freedom of expression, persecution of religious and ethnic minorities and enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests in Laos. In 2001, peaceful demonstrations calling for democratic changes and respect for fundamental human rights in Laos had all been followed by arrests and disappearances. The fact that the Government of Laos had signed two United Nations conventions on human rights in 2000 had not produced any concrete changes in the country. Her organization called upon the competent international organs to condemn the serious violations of human rights in Laos and to urge the Government to respect its own laws as well as the international treaties it had freely subscribed to, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

109. Mr. DEFAGO (International Movement of Apostolate in Independent Social Milieus) said that his organization was concerned by the demonstrations throughout the world for more justice to and participation by the poor and disenfranchised groups. The members of the Commission should listen to the voices of people everywhere who were trying to improve their lot. There were only five years remaining of the United Nations Decade for the Elimination of Poverty and everything possible should be done to achieve that fundamental aim.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.